



The Children's LAW Center of Connecticut

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Written Testimony of Corey Somerville, Staff Mental Health Professional

RE: HB 5014, An Act Making Adjustments To State Expenditures And Revenues For The Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2013.

February 17, 2012

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to you today concerning Governor Malloy's proposed budget adjustments. My name is Corey Somerville and I am the Mental Health Professional at the Children's Law Center. The Children's Law Center is on a mission to protect low-income children involved in family court by providing high quality legal services and advocating for policies that advance the well being and best interests of children.

The Children's Law Center wants to continue on our mission to protect children involved in family court cases. However, with the proposed budget adjustments, **16% of our organizational budget will be cut**, as indicated in the line-item under the Children's Trust Fund.

Last year there were nearly 35,000 family court filings involving divorce and custody in the State of Connecticut. Research shows that children whose parents are divorcing suffer from depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, poor academic performance and are at risk for involvement in the criminal justice system. Teenagers in single-parent families, and in blended families, are three times more likely to need psychological help within a given year. Half of all American children will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage. Of these, close to half will also see the breakup of a parent's second marriage.

The Children's Law Center offers three ongoing programs:

1. **Legal Representation**: Our Staff Attorneys are court appointed to the highest conflict family court cases as legal advocates for indigent children. Their role is to advocate for the child's best interest in order to best protect the child from the negative effects of divorce and litigation.
2. **Children's Law Line**: Statewide, free, legal help-line regarding children and family court issues.
3. **Families in Transition**: Mediation and co-parenting education services to low-income families around the state. By mediating conflicts between parents families are able to avoid litigation. Mediation services around the area often charge upwards of \$200/session, thus, inaccessible to low-income families.

Our services save the state money by increasing the efficiency of the family court system. Last year:

- 85% of our cases end in a settlement or agreement.
- 99% of the time orders entered in a case by the Judge reflect our recommendations.
- 84% of cases handled by CLC remain closed and do not return to court.
- Over 60% of our Law-Line callers are referred by 2-1-1, DCF, or the Court.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today. It is my opinion that The Children's Law Center takes a proactive approach in our programs which allows us, and the State, to makes less reactive decisions in court. We respectfully request your continued support.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if additional information is desired.

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